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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SANAA 002753

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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA, NEA/ARP, NEA/EX, S/CT, CA. DS/DSS,
CENTCOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/19/2013
TAGS: PTER PREL YM COUNTER TERRORISM
SUBJECT: INTERIOR MINISTER ALIMI: NO DETAINEES RELEASED
YET; MOAYED REACTION STILL CALM; NO TIMELINE FOR USS COLE
TRIALS

REF: A. SANAA 2743

- 1B. SANAA 2700
- 1C. SANAA 2701
- 1D. SANAA 2454

Classified By: CDA Alan G. Misenheimer for Reasons 1.5 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary: Charge called on Interior Minister Alimi 11/19 to express concern over Yemen's reported release of 92 security detainees (refs). Alimi said that U.S. concerns had not been ignored, because no/no detainees had yet been released. None slated for release had committed acts of violence inside or outside Yemen. Each of the 92 must provide sworn, written assurances of good conduct, and parallel guarantees from family members, before release can occur. PSO Chief Gamish will decide when the required standard of assurances has been met. Alimi said Embassy Sanaa will &immediately8 receive name and biodata on any detainee actually released, and agreed to discuss with Gamish possible sharing of such data prior to release. He offered no estimate of when releases might occur, but indicated none was imminent. On numbers, Alimi confirmed that 54 of the &candidates8 for release are from the Hattat/Abyan engagement, and 38 are detained on suspicion of affiliation with al-Qaeda or other extremist groups. Alimi, the ROYG,s polished &good cop,8 was at pains to put an upbeat spin on the announced release of detainees, but important questions remain unanswered. Local reaction to the Moayed extradition (minimal) and pending prosecution of Cole suspects (timetable uncertain) were also discussed. End Summary.

12. (C) On 11/19 Charge, joined by Acting LEGATT and Pol/Econ Deputy, called on Interior Minister Dr. Rashad al-Alimi to press U.S. concerns over the ROYG,s 11/17 announcement that 92 security detainees had been released (ref xx). Charge reminded Alimi that the USG had repeatedly requested consultation prior to any detainee release (refs b and c), including in FBI Director Mueller,s 11/5 meeting with President Saleh, and Yemen,s failure to consult prior to announcing releases had caused disappointment and concern in Washington.

13. (C) Alimi said he was briefed on Charge,s meeting with FM Qirbi the previous day, and welcomed the chance to &correct misperceptions8 caused by ROYG media releases. He said Saleh and Yemen,s security services took seriously their responsibility for security in Yemen, and also recognized that the USG shared in responsibility for security and CT efforts regionally and globally. Thus, he said, there must be complete coordination and transparency between the two sides.

DETAINEES MUST MEET CONDITIONS FOR RELEASE; NONE INVOLVED IN VIOLENCE INSIDE OR OUTSIDE YEMEN WILL BE RELEASED

14. (C) Alimi stressed repeatedly that no/no detainees have yet been released, so U.S. concerns have not been ignored. Rather than an instant mass release, the ROYG had initiated a process whereby each of 92 detainees could win release by meeting conditions set by Saleh. Those who failed to do so would remain in jail. None of the detainees slated for release had committed acts of violence inside or outside Yemen. &This is a red line we will not cross,8 said Alimi. He emphasized that any detainee who had committed a violent act would be referred to the Attorney General for prosecution.

NUMBERS

15. (C) In response to questioning by Charge and Acting LEGATT, Alimi summarized the breakdown of numbers as follows. Under Yemen,s dialogue program, teams of religious scholars (ulema) engaged 150 detainees over the past year. PSO Chief Gamish had eliminated 58 of those from consideration from release. Of the remaining 92) all now candidates for release) 54 had surrendered themselves with Khalid Abdul Nabi following the Hattat/Abyan engagement. Alimi described these as non-ideological men in need of jobs, and noted that Abdul Nabi himself "was never arrested." The other 38 were

arrested in various places on suspicion of al-Qaeda membership or other extremist affiliation.

PROCESS

¶16. (C) The Minister explained that the announcement of detainees slated for release began a process whereby each individual must provide written, sworn assurance (a) that he will follow the law and avoid extremist contacts, (b) that he will not attempt to travel outside Yemen without ROYG permission, and (c) that he will report to police when/if called. Each detainee must also obtain parallel guarantees/assurances from family, friends, tribe and business/social associates, who must all: (a) attest to their own belief that the detainee has reformed, (b) agree to inform the police should he misbehave, and (c) tell police where he is when/if asked.

¶17. (C) Political Security Organization Chief Ghaleb al-Gamish will assess when the required standard of assurances is met, and any detainee fails to meet that standard will remain in jail. Alimi noted that the release process was based on positive experience from the release of a smaller number of detainees during Ramadan 2002, including creation of a network of informers who had exposed terrorist sleeper cells. Moreover, the requirement of assurances from family members and other associates turned Yemen's tight-knit tribal/family structure to the advantage of the security services) particularly because relatives would be reluctant to offer assurances unless sincerely convinced the detainee will keep his promises. The 11/17 public announcement of releases was calculated, in part, to spur detainees and their relatives to provide the assurances.

¶18. (C) Once a detainee obtains the necessary assurances, and is approved for release, the PSO will inform the Ministry of Interior, which places him on the ROYG's security &blacklist8 as a person forbidden to travel out of Yemen. When asked, Alimi said that the "blacklist" entails the entry of each name into the Terrorist Interdiction Program (TIP) system.

¶19. (C) Alimi repeatedly declined to offer any timeline for when actual releases might begin. While noting that the process of obtaining assurances could take as little as a few days if a detainee's family were committed to supporting him, Alimi insisted that the &comprehensive" and "time-consuming" nature of the process would mean that no release is imminent.

USG WILL RECEIVE NAMES OF ALL RELEASED DETAINEES

¶10. (C) Dr. Alimi said that the PSO would &immediately8 provide to Embassy Sanaa the name and full biodata of any detainee released. Acting LEGATT said names should be provided now, before release. Failing that, the explanations provided by Alimi were inconsistent with the 11/5 Mueller-Saleh conversation and insufficient to address U.S. concerns. Moreover, U.S. authorities should not have first learned of ROYG detainee release plans via press reports. Alimi said he understood the misunderstanding stemmed from press reports that said detainees were already released when they were not. He offered to discuss the matter further with PSO Chief Gamish to explore whether names could be provided prior to actual release.

¶11. (C) When asked about obtaining the names of detainees released during Ramadan last year, Alimi expressed surprise that the PSO had not provided them. Charge confirmed that the Embassy had not received them. Alimi said he would discuss this meeting with PSO Chief Gamish in "complete detail" and also raise the question of last year's detainee releases. Above all, concluded Alimi, the United States and Yemen need not worry about detainee releases, and should focus on apprehending terrorists who remained at large) particularly Abu Asim al-Makki, Jamal al-Badawi and Fadl al-Quso) because they are the ones who can pose an active threat.

USS COLE SUSPECTS TO TRIAL SOON?

¶12. (C) Charge asked about press reports that more than 60 detainees, including suspects in the USS Cole case, would move to trial in December. Alimi was uncertain. He said he would like to see prosecution move quickly, but expressed concern that the Moayed extradition and instability in Iraq could negatively affect public reaction. He noted that escaped Cole suspects Jamal al-Badawi and Fadl al-Quso could potentially be tried in absentia. (Note: Post will pursue the question with the Attorney General's office.)

MOAYED REACTION CALM; ROYG REMAINS VIGILANT

¶13. (C) Charge thanked Alimi for heightened security preparations in conjunction with the extradition of Sheikh Mohamed al-Moayed from Germany to the United States, and

observed that public reaction had been muted. The Minister agreed, noting that the MOI had no indication of demonstrations or disturbances planned for the impending weekend. The ROYG is nonetheless taking precautionary security measures, said Alimi, and will pay close attention to Friday mosque sermons that could inflame reaction. He added that the ROYG was making "widespread efforts," including media outreach, to keep the situation calm and avert repercussions. He noted that Yemen's Embassy in Washington is working with Moayed's family and supporters to arrange his defense, concluding that the ROYG will now depend on the "justice and fairness" of the American judicial system.

Comment

¶14. (C) Alimi, the ROYG's polished & good cop,⁸ was calm and conciliatory throughout the meeting. He was aware of U.S. concerns (from Charge's meeting with FM Qirbi the previous day), and was at pains to deemphasize the issue and emphasize Yemen's intention to provide notification when a release does occur. Unfortunately he could provide no idea of when that might be, nor any promise that biodata will be provided prior/prior to any release. This may be in part because the process resides with the PSO rather than the MOI, but we will continue working all channels with the ROYG to seek further answers.

MISENHEIMER